

# 117th New York Volunteer Infantry

## Fourth Oneida Regiment

### Regimental History



Organized in Oneida County, New York, in August 1862, the 117th New York Volunteer Infantry ("The Fourth Oneida") was under the command of **Colonel William Russell Pease**. Colonel Pease was a native of Utica, and a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. At the time of his appointment to the 117th he was stationed in Utica as the Mustering and Disbursing Officer for Central New York. He accepted his new commission at Albany on 21 July 1862. The Regiment was mustered into Federal service at Camp Huntington in Rome, New York, on 20 August 1862.

The recruitment areas for its ten companies were:

- Company A - Rome, Utica, Vernon
- Company B - Utica, Camden, Verona, Vienna
- Company C - Utica, Westmoreland, Rome, Bridgewater
- Company D - Whitestown, Sangerfield, Utica, Vienna, New Hartford
- Company E - Rome
- Company F - Oriskany, Trenton, Utica, Floyd, Rome, Steuben, Deerfield
- Company G - Rome, Clayville, Paris, Utica
- Company H - Utica, Vienna, Rome, Camden
- Company I - Rome, Boonville, Ava, Utica, Western, Clayville
- Company K - Clinton, Remsen, Augusta, Boonville, Deansville, Marshall, Vernon

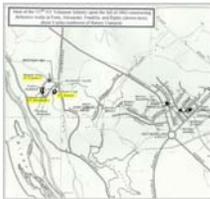
The Regiment departed for Washington, DC, on 22 August via cars (four freight cars and 22 passenger coaches) by way of Albany. There they embarked on a steamboat with two barges for the trip down the Hudson River to Jersey City. The next day the Regiment landed at Jersey City and immediately boarded the cars for Philadelphia and then on to Baltimore. Early in the morning of 25 August, the Regiment arrived in Washington and was temporarily billeted adjacent to the rail depot. Later that same morning, the Regiment formed and marched up Pennsylvania Avenue and encamped at Tenny Town, a distance of about nine miles. Colonel Pease reported to **Brigadier General John G. Barnard**, U.S. Engineers, Engineer-in-Chief for the Defenses of Washington. Tenny Town was a small plain village located at the junction of the Edward's Ferry and Harper's Ferry Turnpikes, about four miles west of Georgetown.



Two days later the Regiment's tents finally arrived. That same night (27 August) the Regiment formed and marched for Chain Bridge (about three miles away) in response to reports that a large body of the enemy had appeared on the opposite side of the Potomac River, near Fort Ethan Allen, the only defense on the southern end of the bridge. General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was at this time maneuvering in the plains around Manassas, Virginia, just two days prior to their battle against Union Major General John Pope's Army of Virginia. Only the night before the Confederate II Corp under the able and greatly respected leadership of Major General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson had destroyed by fire a huge stockpile of Federal stores at Manassas Junction. Colonel Pease was authorized by **General Barnard** to destroy the Chain Bridge, if necessary, to prevent "Stonewall" from a

deeply feared attack on Washington. As the next dawn broke with no action or sightings of the enemy, the Regiment was ordered to return to camp as the enemy had withdrawn. The Battle of Chain Bridge wrote the Regiment's historian: "none killed, none wounded, but it was well known that on the march down, two or three got severely frightened."

Immediately upon its arrival in camp, the Regiment was ordered to move to Fort Pennsylvania (later renamed Fort Reno), about a half mile away. Just days later (30 August) the Regiment was ordered to move again to garrison Fort Alexander and Forts Franklin and Ripley (the later two both unfinished), a distance of about four miles westward, where it remained until the middle of November. Forts Alexander, Franklin and Ripley were renamed (collectively) Fort Sumner in 1863. At least two Companies (D and H) were detached to construct and man Batteries Vermont (near the intersection of McArthur Boulevard and Little Falls Road) and Cameron (in the 1900 block of Foxhall Road at Reservoir Road) respectively.



On 12 November, the Regiment was relieved by the 18th Maine Infantry and it moved to a camp about midway between Forts Alexander and Pennsylvania, a location known as "Camp Mud". While there, a shot was accidentally fired from a gun at Fort Pennsylvania and landed near the 117th's camp. "At first it would seem that the camp had been their target, but in those days, the professional reputation of their artillerymen was such as to effectually exonerate them from any suspicion of criminal intent or even of carelessness. Everybody felt confident that the gun had been trained on an object at least a mile to the right or left of this point."

A week passed before the Regiment moved again, this time to within less than half a mile of Fort Pennsylvania where the Oneida men erected a small fort or redoubt called Fort Elliptic (aka Soapstone Fort). Drilling, camp duty and working on the fort's defenses occupied the troops.

In early December, **General Barnard** ordered the Regiment split into two Battalions of five companies each, and assigned them to special duty some ten miles apart. Thus, on 24 December, Companies A, B, C, D, and K (1st Battalion) broke camp, marched through Georgetown and the Capital Hill area, crossed the east branch of the Potomac River and encamped on the heights near Fort Baker (located along Alabama Avenue (called Old Fort Road during the war) between 30th and 32d Streets). Colonel Pease, accompanying the 1st Battalion, was to assume command of the 3d Brigade, Defenses North of the Potomac, Military District of the Defenses of Washington, Army of the Potomac, headquartered at Fort Baker. The designation of this command, including the 3d Brigade, was changed to Defenses North of the Potomac, XXII Corps, on 2 February 1863, when the Department of Washington was created, and **Brigadier General Joseph Abel Haskin** was assigned command. The 1st Battalion of the 117th New York was largely employed by picket and fatigue (digging) duty, as well as some guard duty at the East Branch Bridge, throughout the balance of the winter months.



The 2nd Battalion comprised of companies E, F, G, H, and I, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alvin White, marched about two miles westward to a point near the Potomac River and encamped on the eastern slope of the bold bluff which afforded Fort Alexander its valuable prominence. This Battalion chopped and dug daily in its effort to complete Fort Ripley throughout the winter.



With the emergence of spring, the two battalions of the Regiment marched convergently to the Navy Yard on the morning of 15 April 1863 and embarked on two awaiting river transports. Two days and a night later they arrived at the dock in Norfolk, Virginia. In cooperation with Confederate Major General Daniel Harvey Hill's advance on Washington, North Carolina, Lieutenant General James ("Pete") Longstreet, commanding the Confederate Department of Southern Virginia and North Carolina, with the divisions of Major Generals George Edward Pickett and John Bell Hood, was making a

demonstration against the besieged Federal garrison at Suffolk, Virginia. The Rebel forces made their guarded approach to the outskirts of Suffolk by the 17th. General Longstreet's force had joined those of Major General Samuel Gibbs French, who was in command of the Confederate Department of Southern Virginia. Embarking on the cars, the 117th New York arrived at Suffolk, and marched through town to the Portsmouth rail line near the Nansemond River. The Rebel guns boomed ahead but the Union works were formidable and manned by 25,000 men, opposed to the combined Confederate force of 20,000. The 117th was ordered to take up a position on the extreme right of the line of defense, to entrench and hold against any attempt of General Hood to turn it. The Regiment was independent with Colonel Pease reporting directly to [Major General John James Peck](#), commanding the VII Corps at Suffolk. Captain Morris' Battery NY Artillery, a Wisconsin Battery and a squadron of 1st NY Mounted Rifles also supported this extreme right side of the line. All were then assigned to [Brigadier General George Washington Getty's](#) 2d Division, VII Corps.

The 117th moved a few miles down the river the next day (the 18th), coming to reside on Cahoon's Point opposite Hill's Point, a prominence upon which the rebel's had deployed a battery of six guns. This battery was suddenly flanked and captured the following day by a detachment of the 89th New York Infantry. This movement reopened Nansemond River to the Suffolk garrison. The 117th was transferred to occupy Hill's Point and bring off the rebel guns. There was a skirmish at the landing that resulted in the death of the first officer of the Fourth Oneida to be killed in battle, 1st Lieutenant Edwin Risley of Company D. The Regiment stayed in this vicinity for about a month, enjoying the rich oyster beds of the river, as General Lee directed General Longstreet to disengage from Suffolk and rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg on 29 April. By mid May the Regiment had moved to the south side of Julian's Creek, a branch of the Elizabeth River, about four miles south of Portsmouth. For the time being, they were back in the picketing and fort-building business.

With General Robert E. Lee's second invasion of the North in June 1863 opening the Gettysburg Campaign, the entire Norfolk force was put in motion. The 117th marched to Portsmouth on the 22d where it took transports to Yorktown, encamping there until 1 July. That day it moved again by river transport up to White House and commenced a hard march toward Hanover Court House with the intent to disrupt Lee's communications with Richmond. Often referred to as the "Blackberry Raid", the Regiment stayed near Hanover until its return to Fort Monroe following Lee's escape from Pennsylvania. They returned to Portsmouth on the 29th but were in motion again soon after.

Boarding their transports again, the Regiment headed for the open ocean, turning to the south after rounding Cape Henry. While en route Charleston, the unseaworthy vessel was forced to put in to Beaufort Harbor, North Carolina, for repairs. The Regiment was there assigned to the substantial and capacious government transport R.S. SPAULDING. The change of transports and the voyage on to Charleston were made on the 1st and 2nd days of August. They landed on Folly Island on the 3rd. They were then assigned to United States Forces, Northern End of Folly Island, Brigadier General Israel Vodges' Division, Colonel Samuel M. Alford's Brigade.



[Major General Quincy Adams Gillmore](#), as commander of the Department of the South and of the X Corps, and Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, who recently assumed command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, had developed a plan to gain a foothold on Morris Island. But they had to neutralize Fort Wagner, an isolated redoubt that extended entirely across a narrow part of the island. Failed attacks on 10 and 18 July forced [General Gillmore](#) to engage in a siege operation against the Fort at the time of the 117th New York's arrival on Folly Island. By 6 September [General Gillmore's](#)

attack force had reached the ditch of Fort Wagner; an assault was ordered for the 7th. The Confederates, however, abandoned Morris Island during the night of the 6th.



The 117th New York was not engaged in this action as it had moved, on 22 August, to Morris Island and then on to Block Island. It remained there about a month before

returning to Folly Island after the "fall" of Fort Wagner. Much of the command was engaged in heavy (digging) duty and elements were sent to guard the Commissary Depot at Pawnee Landing. The Regiment maintained this position through much of the winter. It was briefly engaged on Little Folly Island during an ineffective demonstration against Charleston on 8 February 1864.



In early April, **General Gillmore** was ordered to send all available forces of X Corps to Fort Monroe for reorganization as a part of the Army of the James. Eleven regiments (about 10,000 soldiers) were transferred north. Consequently, on 19 April, the 117th embarked at Pawnee Landing onboard the steamboat NEPTUNE. From there they headed for Hilton Head where the command transferred to the propeller transport BLACKSTONE, arriving at West Point, Virginia, by the end of the month, joining there the X and XVIII Corps encampments of the Army of the James, **Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler**, Commanding. The 117th was assigned to the 1st Brigade (**Colonel Guy V. Henry** of the 40th Massachusetts Mounted Infantry), 2d Division (**Colonel Alford** (to 2 May 1864) and then **Brigadier General John Wesley Turner**), of the X Corps, **Major General Gillmore**, Commanding. Other commands in the 1st Brigade included the 3d, 89th and 142d New York as well as the 40th Massachusetts. The X Corps assembled in the vicinity of Yorktown where it was organized into three divisions. It numbered present for duty 16,812 infantry and 1,114 artillerymen with 46 guns.



In conjunction with the opening of **Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's** Overland Campaign, and following a short stay in the vicinity of West Point, the Brigade left the confluence of the Pamunky and Mattaponi Rivers onboard four transports on 4 May. Under the escort of two Navy gunboats, this mini-flotilla, including the transport ship COLUMBIA with the 117th embarked, steamed down the York River, rounded Fort Monroe and headed up the James River. They landed at Bermuda Hundred on 6 May 1864. **General Grant** had ordered **General Butler** to land his 33,000 strong Army of the James as far up the south side of the James River as he could with the intention of severing the Richmond-Petersburg Railroad between these two vital cities and then moving on Richmond itself. Keeping these orders in mind, **General Butler** landed one division at City Point and the other five at Bermuda Hundred on 5 and 6 May, while the Army of the Potomac commenced the fighting in the Wilderness 80 miles to the north. Bermuda Hundred was a strategically sound place for such a landing, being well within striking distance of the vital Richmond-Petersburg railway, and only 18 miles from the Confederate capitol. By the end of 6 May, **General Butler's** entrenchments were complete, and he was ready to strike against the Rebel forces in the area. His line stretched a distance of about three miles at this narrow point of Bermuda Hundred Neck with its right resting on the James River to the north and its left on the Appomattox River to the south. Probes by Federal troops on 6 May against Confederate Brigadier General Johnson Hagood's brigade at Port Walthall Junction were initially halted.



The next day **General Butler** ordered **Brigadier General Willaim Thomas Brooks'** 1st Division, XVIII Corps forward against the reinforced rebel forces at Port Walthall Junction now under the command of Brigadier General Bushrod Johnson. Although the Federal force outmanned the Rebels by nearly three to one, General Johnson's six infantry regiments held off 19 Federal infantry regiments until sunset when the later withdrew. In response, the rebels retired beyond Swift Run Creek and awaited additional reinforcements. Meanwhile, the 117th, while not engaged directly against General Johnson's forces, spend all day tearing up railroad track, and reached a point about five miles from Petersburg. **General Butler** spent 8 May putting the final touches on a plan that would carry his army to the town of Petersburg, the capture of which would secure his southern flank while he drove toward his primary objective, Richmond. The Regiment supported Colonel Richard White's 1st Brigade, 3d Division, X Corps, while heavily engaged on the 9th south of Chester Station at the Battle of Swift Creek, a mere five miles outside Petersburg.



Over 14,000 infantry troops, including the 117th New York, moved toward Petersburg on the 9th. Approaching Port Wathall Junction, **Major General William Farrar "Baldy" Smith**, commander of the XVIII Corps, started receiving fire and sent for **General Gillmore's** X Corps to assist him in the fight. The X Corps occupied Chester Station unopposed on the 10th and had intended to spend some time there tearing up telegraph lines and destroying all railroad equipment and property in the area. The X Corps proceeded south and attempted to bag the rebels engaged at Port Wathall Junction. Realizing their plight, the Confederate troops pulled south, escaping the trap laid for them.



After his repulse at Swift Creek and Fort Clifton on 9 May, **General Butler** withdrew temporarily into his entrenchments at Bermuda Hundred. A Confederate army of 18,000 was patched together under the command of Major General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (victor of Fort Sumter and First Manassas/Bull Run) to confront the Army of the James. On the 11th the 117th New York accompanied the 3d New York Infantry during their heavy engagement with the enemy in the vicinity of Fort Jackson, southwest of Fort Darling in the Drewry's Bluff complex. On 12 May, **General Butler** moved north against the Confederate line at Drewry's Bluff but again adopted a defensive position when his attack was not supported by Navy gunboats. On the 13th a Union column struck the right flank of the Confederate line at the Wooldridge House, carrying a line of works. **General Butler** remained cautious, however, giving General Beauregard time to concentrate his forces. The 117th was engaged in skirmishing throughout the 15th. The following dawn, in a very heavy fog, rebel forces of Major General Robert Ransom's division made a decided and vigorous attack on the right of the XVIII Corps near the banks of the James River capturing Brigadier General Charles Adam Heckman and scores of his troops. Along the left of the Federal line, the 6th Connecticut of the X Corps, which was on the skirmish line in advance, gave way, vacating its temporary entrenchment of which the enemy took immediate possession. This change placed the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division (**Turner**), in great peril. During this battle at Drewry's Bluff, Colonel Alvin White was severely wounded and the command fell upon Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Daggett. Subsequent Confederate attacks lost direction in the fog, but the Federals were so disorganized and demoralized that **General Turner** ordered the 117th to hold its position as it guarded the retirement of the remainder of the division, including its guns. The position, despite the superior numbers of the enemy, was held for 25 minutes when the order came to fall back, by which time the enemy had flanked and nearly surrounded the 117th. But the regiment managed to dash through the breach, reformed under fire, and left the field in line, passing an aid station where surgeons were frantically burying battle fatalities before falling back themselves. Only Company H maintained her line throughout. The Regiment lost 20 killed, 62 wounded, and 7 missing during this battle. This battle marked the end of **General Butler's** offensive against Richmond and, as described by **General Grant**, the Army of the James was indeed "bottled up". The days ahead were full of entrenching as a heavy breastwork was constructed across the Bermuda Hundred peninsula, from the James on the right to the Appomattox on the left. The enemy built similarly and the Brigade remained in place for an addition two or three weeks. The only significant action during this period occurred when General Beauregard attacked the Bermuda Hundred line near Ware Bottom Church. With nearly 10,000 troops engaged, the rebels forced the retreat of Union pickets to the Howlett Line. This action allowed General Beauregard to detach strong reinforcements for General Lee's army in time for the fighting at Cold Harbor.



On 28 May, the Brigade marched across the Appomattox River and camped near City Point. The next day, it sailed to White House, arriving there on the 31st. A heavy battle was then in progress at Cold Harbor but the Brigade remained on the Lee plantation for three days on picket duty before marching to the battlefield. **General Turner's** 2d Division and **General Ames' 3d** Division of the X Corps were consolidated to form a temporary 3d Division, XVIII Corps (**Smith**) under division commander **Brigadier General Charles Devens, Jr.** The 3d Division participated in the attacks at Cold

Harbor 1-3 June, remained there for about nine days, enduring a near constant exchange of musketry with the enemy along the seven mile front that extended from Bethesda Church to the Chickahominy River. Moving further back into the woods only brought on the "whiz" of the mortar rounds. At dawn on 3 May, the II Corps (commanded by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, U.S.V.) and XVIII Federal Corps, followed later by the IX Corps (Major General Ambrose Everette Burnside, U.S.V.), assaulted along the Bethesda Church-Cold Harbor line and were slaughtered at all points. General Grant commented years later in his memoirs that this was the only attack he wished he had never ordered as Union casualties were extremely high (over 13,000 Federals were killed, wounded or missing in action). On 12 June, the 117th and its Brigade returned to White House, embarked transports, sailed down the Pamunkey and the York Rivers, past Fort Monroe and headed up the James River, past Harrison's Landing where a 2,200-foot pontoon bridge had recently been laid for the passage of the Army of the Potomac at Windmill Point. General Grant had decided to abandon the well-defended northern and eastern approaches to Richmond, gambling that he could move his army south of the James River quickly to threaten Petersburg and the perceived softer southern approaches to the capital city. Major General George Gordon Meade's Army of the Potomac was south of the James River by the 18th and began moving towards Petersburg to support and renew General Butler's assaults. Meanwhile, by nightfall on the 14th, the Brigade, now reassigned to the X Corps, had returned to the Bermuda Hundred line in its former position on the right of the line of defenses adjacent to the James River.



The 117th quickly rejoined the race for Petersburg and was instrumental in the capture of the Petersburg Heights on the 15th where it anchored the extreme left of the Federal assaulting force. Captains Almon R. Stevens of Company H, although severely wounded in the arm, and William J. Hunt of Company F were both most conspicuous and widely credited for their gallantry. The next day, the II and IX Corps joined on the left and were soon assaulted by the Confederates, causing General Butler's forces to become disorganized and demoralized. On the 18th, the II, XI (Major General Horatio

Gouverneur Wright, U.S.V., Commanding), and V (Major General Gouverneur Kemble Warren, U.S.V., Commanding) Corps from right to left counterattacked but were completely repulsed with heavy casualties. With the Confederate works thoroughly manned, this greatest opportunity to sieze Petersburg without a siege was lost and the siege began. General Butler disengaged from the battle and again withdrew to his lines at Bermuda Hundred. General Beauregard followed General Butler to his defensive position and attacked the Army of the James at Ware Bottom Church on 20 May. The rebel forces drove back the Union forces and constructed fortifications of their own, thereby bottling up the Army of the James until General Grant's crossing in mid-June was completed.



The Brigade was reorganized at this time as the 13th Indiana was being mustered out by virtue of expired time, with the 112th New York (from Chatauqua County) added as its substitute. It manned that part of the Bermuda Hundred line on the right, with the 112th occupying the extreme right overlooking the James River and the small peninsula which General Butler soon after attempted to isolate with his Dutch Gap Canal. By 24 May, the Regiment had crossed the Appomattox River once more and manned the Petersburg front between the IX and XVIII Corps. They remained in place

in this trench or rifle pits stretching across a cornfield for a month. During this time, Colonel Pease of the 117th took sick leave, never to return to his command. Captain Hunt was fatally wounded along these works on the Petersburg front. Temporary command of the X Corps transferred from General Gillmore to Major General Alfred H. Terry on 14 June and was transferred again on the 18th to Major General William Thomas Harbaugh Brooks, former commander of the 1st Division, XVIII Corps. General Brooks resigned on 18 July due to failing health. Command of the X Corps temporarily passed again to General Terry.



Late on 29 July, the 2nd Division, X Corps moved out from its Petersburg works and formed to the rear of the General Burnside's IX Corps, the command specifically designed by General Grant to storm Cemetery Hill just east of the city and capture Petersburg. But even with the explosion of the mine, a

massive undertaking spearheaded by pre-war miners from the coal fields of western Pennsylvanian, failed on the morning of the 30th. The resulting Battle of the Crater foiled the Federal plan to capture Petersburg due to poor coordination, political infighting between corps commanders and universal unenthusiastic support. The 117th New York, now under the temporary command of Major Egbert Bagg, was engaged at the mine as a supporting unit but its efforts were uncoordinated and proved to be for naught. The entire Division was soon forced to return to its trenches.



On 31 July the Brigade, including the 117th New York, commenced a march for City Point. Rumor that it was headed back to Washington cheered the troops but were dashed as it turned again toward the Appomattox. Once across the pontoons, it halted about 1 mile from the James River, and set up camp on either side of the road the following day. [Major General David Bell Birney](#) assumed command of the X Corps shortly thereafter. Relative peace prevailed until the enemy executed an attack on the Bermuda Hundred line on 25 August, during which 17 members of the 117th were captured. The next day, the Brigade relieved elements of the XVIII Corps in the trenches before Petersburg. Late on 24 September, the Brigade and the entire Division moved out and back on the Heights, near the City Point Railroad that had been extended to the vicinity of the Weldon Road. Two days later, the order to reduce baggage portended a forthcoming hard march and more fighting.



Between 1862 and 1864 three major Union drives reached dangerously close to the Confederate capital. Two of those, the Seven Days campaign and the battle of Cold Harbor, were checked by the Army of Northern Virginia. The third came closest of the three to victory when the Army of the James nearly broke through the Richmond defenses in September 1864 at New Market Heights and Chaffin's Farm. Fewer than 4,500 Confederate troops covered the entire Fort Harrison and New Market Height lines. During the night of 28-29 September, the Army of the James (X and XVIII Corps) were soon moving, with the 1st Brigade, 2d Division ([Brigadier General Robert Sanford Foster](#)), X Corps, under the command of Colonel Daggett. Assuming they were to board transports, the Corps moved out for Deep Bottom Landing. They were quite surprised to find the pontooniers had extended the road to the opposite bank at the landing that the Corps was soon across. In preparation for this advance on Richmond, [General Butler](#) had divided his army into two wings. [General Birney](#) was responsible for the Ring Wing of the Army, which consisted of his X Corps and the 3d Division, XVIII Corps, under the command of Brigadier General Charles Jackson Paine. At sunrise on the 29th, Colonel Daggett led the 1st Brigade, 2d Division, forward against the enemy entrenchment on New Market Heights, and towards the Charles City Road. The Heights were seized, and the X Corps then moved up and occupied the Confederate exterior line up to the Darbytown Road and in the vicinity of the Clynes' house. The enemy pulled back about a mile to a point along the road near Laurel Hill Church where they formed another defensive line across the Darbytown Road. The 1st Brigade, 2d Division, followed and attacked but was repulsed. The 2d and 3d Brigades join up and the 2d Division successfully advanced, driving the enemy back to their intermediate line. Turning to his left rear, [General Foster's](#) Division then prepared to attack Fort Gilmer. With several attacks on the Fort repulsed, the Division withdrew to a position adjacent to the exterior line from the New Market Road down to the right of Fort Harrison. Fort Harrison was on the highest ground in the vicinity and was the most powerful work confronting the Federals. The trees in front of it had been felled to provide a field of fire, and the open space was cluttered with stumps. The parapets were nearly 20 feet tall, and six heavy guns including 8-inch Columbiads, 32-pounders, and a large rifled Parrott faced the attackers. These pieces should have compensated for the inadequate strength of the garrison (less than 300 soldiers) but four of the guns were inoperable. General Lee had moved two additional Confederate divisions to the area with the General himself arriving near Chaffin's Farm about 2:30pm, a short time after the X Corps initial attack on Fort Gilmer. Efforts by the rebel forces to retake Fort Harrison on the 30th were not successful. [General Grant](#) decided not to renew the attack on the 30th, ordering the Army of the James to maintain its defensive position in preparation for General Lee's subsequent unsuccessful counterattack. General Lee's reinforcements move to meet this latest threat against

Richmond weakened his lines at Petersburg; **General Grant** now prepared to take advantage of that weakness. During the engagement on 29 September, the 117th New York fought gallantly, losing 15 killed, 76 wounded, and 33 missing. The 2d Division occupied Fort Gilmer for over two months, when it departed to take part in the first expedition against Fort Fisher. During this time, General Lee, responding to the loss of Fort Harrison (now renamed Fort Burnham in honor of Brigadier General Hiram Burnham who fell in the fighting on 29 September) and the increasing Federal threat to Richmond, directed an offensive against the Union far right flank on 7 October. This Confederate assault along the main Union defensive line near the New Market Road was repulsed. Following this action, the armies faced each other along this front until 2 April 1865 when the Richmond-Petersburg line was evacuated.

In mid October, representatives visited the 117th from Oneida County who arrived to receive the election ballots of the soldiers. Representatives from either part came on that mission to the 117th, "which furnished a handsome Republican majority," not an uncommon position among the largely New England and New York soldiers of the X Corps. **Major General Birney**, X Corps, contracted malaria and died on 17 October in Philadelphia. Command was then transferred to **General Terry**.



While the Army of the Potomac attacked the Confederate works protecting the South Side Railroad and the Boydton Plank Road, **General Grant** ordered **General Butler's** Army of the James to create a diversion north of the James River so the General Robert E. Lee would not reinforce his Petersburg lines with troops from Richmond. **General Butler's** plan was to march **Major General Godfrey Weitzel's** XVIII Corps northward to the Williamsburg Road and flank the Confederate line while **General Terry's** X Corps pinned the Confederates along the Charles City Road farther south.

Well before dawn on 27 October, the 2d Division, X Corps, began a movement across the New Market Road, advancing some two miles beyond the Union entrenchments, to the Darbytown Road near the Johnson House, across which it formed for battle. **General Foster's** 2d Division was on the left of the road, with the 3d Division to its left, and the 1st Division to the right side of the road. The XVIII Corps preceded still farther to its right, taking up a position near the Charles City Road. The 1st Brigade, 2d Division, X Corps, now under the command of **Colonel Newton Martin Curtis** (formerly commander of the 142d New York and who would go on to win the Medal of Honor as well as the Thanks of Congress for his actions at Fort Fisher), was ordered to push the enemy skirmishers back within their works, which he did at considerable loss. **Captain Linus R. Clark (Company K)** led the 117th's skirmish line until he fell severely wounded in the leg; **Captain John F. Thomas** of Company F took his place on the line. Late in the day the Brigade received the order to move forward and charge. Like the engagement at Chaffin's Farm, this one on the Darbytown Road (aka Fair Oaks), the Brigade executed a desperate charge against superior numbers entrenched, suffering greatly with heavy losses (about 300 killed or wounded for the Brigade). The 117th sustained a loss of 6 killed, 42 wounded, and 4 missing; total, 52.

In early December, on account of the reformation of all the colored troops into one corps called the XXV Corps commanded by **Major General Godfrey Weitzel**, the X Corps was discontinued, and **Colonel Curtis' 1st Brigade, 2d Division, X Corps**, was placed in **Brigadier General Adelbert Ames' (2d) Division of the XXIV Corps**. **General Butler** was also relieved by **Major General Edward Otho Cresap Ord**, U.S.V. as Commander, Army of the James. **General Butler's** next assignment was the first expedition to the Wilmington, North Carolina, fortress Fort Fisher. Wilmington was the South's last open seaport on the Atlantic coast.

On 7 December, the 117th New York, along with the 2d Division, marched back to the Bermuda Hundred landing where it soon set sail onboard the transport WEYBOSSETT. Arriving off Fort Monroe the next day, they joined many other transports and gunboats joining up for **General Butler's** venture to Fort Fisher.

This great fleet finally set to sea on the 14th, the delay being caused by the last minute

construction of a "powder boat." This fleet, "the most formidable armada ever collected for concentration upon one given point," arrived off Federal Point on the 15th. Another delay of four days forced this fleet to replenish both coal and water at Morehead City, North Carolina. Underway again on the 20th, the force was met by a dangerous gale off Wilmington, which again delayed the landing and required the fleet to return to Morehead City once more. At length, on the 24th, the fleet again set to sea for Federal Point. That night, Rear Admiral David Porter unleashed the guns of the U.S. Navy against Fort Fisher, a bombardment he sustained well into the following morning.



About noon, the debarkation of **General Ames'** (2d) Division began. The Division landed about three miles north of Fort Fisher. Opposition to the landing was weak and brief. **Colonel Curtis**, followed by his Brigade, was first to land. **Colonel Curtis** directed his two Brigades into position just in rear of the outer works of the Fort. The following events occurred:

"Soon after the 1st brigade, under **Colonel Curtis**, had taken position just in rear of the outer works of the Fort, a courier reported to the General that a battery of artillery were trying to escape toward Wilmington by the river road. The General immediately ordered Captain Stevens (who was then acting on his staff) to take the two companies on the right of the 117th Regiment, to pursue and capture them if possible. The Captain started at once, with companies H and B, and soon came up with the guns, which the fugitives had abandoned, the more fully to ensure their own safety. The captain followed as far as seemed expedient, halted and threw out his command as skirmishers, when Colonel Daggett came up with the balance of the regiment. While the command was assuming a defensive form, Captain Thomas came in with a rebel officer, one Major Reese, whom he had met, and who was inquiring for the Commanding officer. The Major said he had a command of some over 200 men, or boys, which he wished to surrender. On being farther questioned, he said his command was a part of the [4th Regiment] North Carolina Junior Reserves, and that they were on the river bank, a few hundred yards distant. The Colonel, naturally enough, suspected a trick, and inclined to conduct accordingly. The Major observed this, asked the Colonel if he was a Mason. The Colonel replied, "No, but the Captain is," (referring to Captain Stevens). The Major then stepped up to the Captain, and soon made himself known as a brother in the fraternity, and satisfied him as to the truth of his statement. Upon this, the Captain told the Colonel, that if he would furnish him a guard of eight or ten men, he would go with the Major, receive the surrender, and bring the men in. The Colonel replied substantially, that his men were all right, but his faith was weak. The Major having overheard the conversation, now remarked, "Captain, I had rather you would not take a guard." On being asked why, he said he was fearful "that the boys, on hearing a number advancing on them, might fire, and that he wanted the surrender accomplished without any further delay or trouble."

"The Captain then remarked, "Very well, Major, I will go with you alone," which he did. The two had gone about 200 yards beyond our lines, when they were brought to a sudden halt by the sound of the clicking of muskets. The Captain at once demanded of the Major, "What does that mean," when he got this reply: "The boys are preparing to fire on us; wait a moment." The Major then advanced three or four paces and gave a preconcerted signal, which was answered, when he added, "Don't fire, boys," the answer came, "No Major, we won't." Then turning to the Captain, the Major, in a low tone, said, "Come on, Captain, its all right." It being very dark, the two officers were not seen till almost in the midst of the troops. The Major then made the announcement, "Well, boys, I've surrendered." "Not by a d-n sight!" said one soldier, with great emphasis. "Yes! Yes! I have," said the Major, "We are surrounded and can't get away." "Yes," added the Captain, who not having spoken, had not been specially observed nor recognized, "We have got you Boys, you may as well give it up." Upon this, one of them approached the Captain, and, after

peering in his face and scrutinizing him minutely, broke out with, "Be you a Yankee officer?" The Captain answered, "Yes," when the soldier, retiring one step, struck a peculiarly expressive attitude and exclaimed, "Well, by G-d!!" The Captain at once ordered the Major to form his men in marching order, which he did, the Captain, in the meanwhile, being asked many times what was to be done with them, if they were to be killed, &c. &c. On being assured that they would be better off than in their own army, they came without further questioning, saying to one another, "We can't be any worse off, any how." "We have never received a cent of pay, nor scarcely anything to eat, except what we have picked up." They were soon under way. On approaching the lines, they were met by Captain Thomas with a squad of men, in search of Captain Stevens, his long absence having excited suspicion of rebel treachery. On being assured it was all right, he seemed much relieved, when he faced about preceding the prisoners."



Shortly thereafter, Colonel Daggett received the order to retire immediately to the beachhead; [General Butler](#) had ordered a complete withdrawal at the moment of victory. While the 2d and 3d Brigades were successfully extracted, the 1st was not so fortunate due to rising seas. It was not until the 27th that the sea subsided enough to permit the return of the 1st Brigade to its transport WEYBOSSETT. [Colonel Curtis](#) was greatly displeased at the withdrawal order and reported it directly to [General Grant](#) who, in his final report, thus alluded to [Colonel Curtis](#) and his staff: "On the return of the expedition, officers and men, among them [Brevet Major General \(then Brevet Brigadier General\) Newton M. Curtis](#), First Lieutenant George W. Ross, [of Company A, 117th New York] --- Regiment Vermont Volunteers, 1st Lieutenant G. W. Walling and 2nd Lieutenant George Simpson, 142nd New York Volunteers, voluntarily reported to me, that when recalled, they were nearly into the Fort, and in their opinion, it could have been taken without much loss." This marked the end of [Major General Benjamin Bulter's](#) military career. The Division retired hence to Bermuda Hundred, arriving late on the 30th.



Four days later the Division received orders to return to Fort Fisher. This second expedition was commanded by [here](#)). They set out on 9 January 1865 for the Cape Fear fortress. The 117th, under Colonel Daggett, broke camp late in the afternoon of the 3rd and moved to the Bermuda Hundred landing. The 1st Brigade, some 1,400 strong, embarked onboard the ocean steamer ATLANTIC. The armada arrived in the vicinity of the Fort late on the 12th and commenced it's landing about two miles north the following morning, the debarkation being conducted under the shelter of the fire from the frigate BROOKLYN. That night the 1st Brigade, having moved about a mile down the beach, joined General Paine's division of colored troops, and entrenched across the peninsula in the vicinity of a small, unfinished work facing the west end of the land front of Fort Fisher, and just opposite of Major General Robert F. Hoke's division. The next day, the Brigade moved diagonally southwest into a position in the rear of and adjacent to the river from which it subsequently launched its attack on the Fort.



[General Curtis'](#) 1st Brigade was now composed of the 3rd, 112th, 117th, and 142nd New York Regiments. By early evening of the 14th, it's line stretched from the sea to the river across the peninsula, and as defended by a forward deployed skirmish line maintained by Captain David B. Magill (Company D) and 1st Lieutenant John H. Fairbanks (Company K), both of the 117th. By the next sunrise, this line had moved to within 200 yards of the parapet. The Brigade waited, crouching low to avoid the incessant bombardment from the Navy's guns. With the sailors and mariners attacking from the seaside, the Army's movement against the northern face of Fort Fisher began at 3:00pm. The fighting was fierce, lasting nearly seven hours. [Brigadier General Curtis](#) and his 1st Brigade were the first Union troops inside the Fort, the axmen cutting gaps through the palisades, and the rest of the

brigade gaining the parapet. Right behind arrived the 2d and 3d Brigades. Later that Sunday night the Fort fell, Colonel William Lamb surrendering his garrison forces at about 10:00pm. At the time of the surrender, all three brigades of **General Ames' 2d Division** were inside the Fort, and had recently been reinforced by Colonel Joseph Carter Abbott's Brigade of the 2d Division (temporarily assigned).



Casualties in the 117th were heavy: Lieutenant Colonel Francis X. Myers was severely wounded, as was Major Bagg, and Captain Algernon E. Smith, who had been acting as an aid to General Terry. Captain Magill and Lieutenant Fairbanks, who had formed the advanced skirmish line, were both wounded late in the engagement. Captain John T. Thomas was instantly killed as he entered the Fort. Many soldiers were killed and wounded as well. Nearly every one of **General Ames'** staff was wounded, among them Captain Richard W. Dawson of the 85th Pennsylvania who was mortally wounded. **General Curtis**, of the 1st Brigade, lost an eye to a shell fragment. Colonel Galusha Pennypacker, commanding the 2d Brigade, was also severely wounded. Colonel Louis Bell, commanding the 3d Brigade, was killed.



On the morning of 18 January, **Major General John McAllister Schofield** and the 2d and 3d Divisions of his XXIII Corps arrived from Tennessee. Landing on Federal Point, they soon advanced on the city of Wilmington. Senior to **General Terry**, **General Schofield** assumed command of all Federal troops in the area and orchestrated the fall of the last vital southern port of Wilmington. On 16 February **General Schofield** ferried 8,000 men commanded by Major General Jacob D. Cox to the west bank of the Cape Fear River near Smithville. While Admiral David Porter's fleet fired on Fort Anderson (silencing all 12 guns), General Cox swung his force to the west to envelop the Confederate works. The 117th, and the rest of the Brigade, were part of this movement. They moved up the west bank of the Cape Fear River, engaging in occasional skirmishes, and arrived in the vicinity of Fort Anderson on 18 February; the enemy, commanded by Brigadier General Johnson Hagood, seeing this advance, abandoned the fort and retreated on the 19th. They formed a new defensive line eight miles to the north behind Town Creek east of the Cape Fear River. This new line quickly fell also. During the night of 21-22 February, General Braxton Bragg, commanding all Confederate forces in eastern North Carolina, ordered the evacuation of Wilmington, burning cotton, tobacco, and a mountain of government stores. The Brigade arrived in the city of Wilmington mid-day on the 22nd and was involved with the freeing of many Federal prisoners of war. Next, the Brigade was assigned picket duty along the Newbern Road north of the city.

On 15 March, **General Terry's** Provisional Corps departed Wilmington, moving northward parallel to the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad in conjunction with **Major General William Tecumseh Sherman**, whose advance set out from Fayetteville on the same date. To their left, the soldiers could hear the artillery fire between **Generals Sherman** and Johnson, first at Averasboro on 16 March and then at Bentonville on the 19th.

On the morning of the 19th, the Brigade reached Keenansville, capital of Duplin County. On the fifth day out of Wilmington, they reached Warsaw Station. From this point **General Terry's** force moved northwest, crossing the Neuse River at Coxe's Bridge, about 10 miles above Goldsboro. Here they laid pontoons for the passage of **General Sherman's** Army of the Military Division of the Mississippi. **General Sherman** himself arrived on 22 March, visiting with **General Terry** for a few hours.

The X Corps next moved, on the 25th, to Faison's Station, which is on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, about 20 miles south of Goldsboro. They remain in place there for nearly three weeks, assigned to guarding the road. While there they were (moderately but daily) harassed by the rebel cavalry of Major General Joseph Wheeler. The command was also reassigned as one of the two Army corps which constituted the Center of **Major General Sherman's** Army of the Military Deivision of Mississippi. The new command structure is shown [here](#).

On 9 April, news of the evacuation of Richmond arrived. The Corps prepared for an

immediate advance. Next day, the column set out for Raleigh. The troops were eager to take part in this final drama of the war. The march took them through the Bentonville battlefield. On the 13th a courier arrived with an official dispatch containing the news of General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. Jubilation! The next day the Corps arrived in sight of Raleigh and established camp to the southeast of the city about three fourths of a mile out. Much of [General Sherman's](#) army arrived at the same time, the forces together encircling the town. It was widely known by the troops that [General Sherman](#) was confronting Major General Joseph Eggleston Johnston and that the latter was at the verge of capitulating. Rumor of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln reached the armies at this time; confirmation came two days later.

When Washington turned down the surrender terms [General Sherman](#) had offered General Johnston, the 117th New York prepared to move against the Army of Tennessee. On 26 April, General Johnston surrendered his forces in eastern Carolina prior to any serious troop movement against him. [General Grant](#) was en route Raleigh and arrived in time to participate in a Grand Review of the armies so located. A few days later, [General Sherman's](#) Army set out for Washington, while [General Terry's](#) Corps remain at Raleigh. The remaining troops moved to a suitable camp north of town on the premises of Kenneth Raynor, formerly a prominent southern Congressman. The 117th camped just to the rear of his mansion, and there they remain through the later half of April, and through the month of May.

Word that the 117th was soon to be sent home arrived on 1 June. A busy week followed with officers and clerks working well into the darkness preparing the final muster rolls. The Regiment was mustered out on 9 June 1865. The 117th New York left the Empire State in August 1862 with 1,020 soldiers; it mustered out 315 men heroes.



The morning of the 9th, these veterans boarded the cars for Gaston, and then on to Hicksford, arriving after midnight. From there they march overland to City Point, which they reached, on the 14th. They travel next, by steamboat, to Fort Monroe. From that point, they embarked on the transport EDWARD EVERETT bound for New York City, arriving there on Sunday, the 17th. They arrived in Albany the next day, and rode on to Syracuse via the cars, stopping briefly in Utica. After spending about 10 days in camp at Syracuse, the remaining members of the Regiment were paid off and honorably discharged. This final mustering out date was 28 June 1865.

During the years 1862 to 1865, the 117th New York received about 500 recruits. Of these, about half were transferred to the 48th New York Volunteer Infantry (late recruits, younger officers and reenlisted men totaling about 150 effectives, the balance being in hospitals); their terms of service would all expire by 1 October 1865. Thus, the Regiment lost, during its full term of service, about 1,000 men.



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